

ABM

# Staff Chief Sees Early ABM Move

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Gen. Earle G. Wheeler said yesterday the U.S. should decide "within the next few months" to build an antibal-  
listic missile defense if Russia fails to agree to dampen the arms race.

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said an ABM system, which might cost \$20 billion for the defense of 50 cities, could not be delayed indefinitely if prospects for agreement on missile limitation were talked to death.

"In all fairness, I must say they are not being talked to death now," he said in an interview after taping ABC's "Issues and Answers" (WMAL) for viewing today. "This would be a major decision for the Kremlin, and I'm sure they're giving it exhasutive study."

Last week his boss, Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara, who favors reliance on greater long-range offensive missile strength against his chiefs' preference for ABM, acknowledged that the U.S.-Soviet talks to freeze ABM plans were making "very slow progress."

## Middle East Outlook

He predicted that today's high tension in the Middle East would grow worse in 1968, when the British withdraw their garrison from the South Arabian Federation without promising to guarantee the security of the newly independent state.

To a suggestion that the Federation might request the same guarantee of security from the U.S. that Saudi Arabia received in 1962, the General replied:

"We'd not welcome that—we have enough responsibilities elsewhere."

Wheeler, who soon will make his second visit of 1967 to South Vietnam, said Friday's action by U.S. Marines in the demilitarized zone was well below the threshold of provoking Communist Chinese intervention in the war.

"They'd intervene overtly only if we presented some direct threat to them, to their territory or their independence," he said. "I know a lot of people don't agree with that, and some say so pretty strongly. That doesn't include anyone of the Joint Chiefs."

## Wouldn't Cross River

American troops would not cross the Ben Hai River into the North Vietnamese side of the DMZ, he said. A strip roughly three miles wide on each side of the river was designated by the Geneva powers in 1954 as a neutral zone.

Asked about the hot-pursuit rule that requires a unit commander to protect his forces by keeping the enemy at a safe distance, Wheeler said the search-and-destroy operation going on was not of the type that required a chase into enemy territory.

The Communists had been using the South Vietnamese side of the DMZ to mount heavy attacks on U.S. positions, he said, and they were being dealt with there.